



WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Testimony before Washington Learns Steering Committee September 2006

Governor Gregoire and members of Washington Learns, my name is Mary Jean Ryan and I serve as the chair of the State Board of Education.

Thank you, Washington Learns, for your work. Thank you, Governor Gregoire—your leadership is crucial. The needs of Washington's children are great. The Washington Learns vision and goals are the right ones. It is a critical time—the ultimate test for our generation—can we prepare today's children for tomorrow's opportunities? Can we significantly raise the bar and close the Achievement Gap?

The State Board of Education was reconstituted this year pursuant to legislation passed during the last two sessions. Our new role is to provide strategic oversight of the K-12 system and make recommendations that will help improve student learning and system accountability. All of our work will focus on raising student achievement dramatically.

Several members of the State Board of Education serve on Washington Learns. We have followed your work closely. The State Board of Education stands ready to support enactment and then implementation of your recommendations. We will welcome the "baton".

Specific comments on some of your recommendations that are very high priorities for our work:

We agree with the need to make a whole systems approach—the State Board of Education can see many ways to work better with early learning and with higher education. We see value in a P-20 council concept—with the **Governor's leadership**, it could bring a much needed focus to the transition points between system and facilitate the rigorous examination of student achievement data across what today are often separate silos. For example, by better aligning high school graduation requirements with college entry, we should be able to decrease the level of higher education remedial investment as well as boost the numbers of students moving on to higher education. This is a measurable system improvement goal that we can achieve if we work together across the systems.

We agree with the recommendations stating the need to strengthen the accountability mechanisms and management systems. For K-12, we see that as one of our primary mandates, and will find ways to identify schools and districts that are successful and those that need help as well as possible incentives and interventions. We will look at improving the state's investment return. We will also examine best practices and models that boost district and school performance. We like the idea of looking at comparable demographic "Global Challenge" states against which we can measure our progress.

We agree with the strong focus on math and science. We plan—in collaboration with the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)—to develop a math action plan by December. We must push ourselves to improve our state's performance in math education. Then, we will delve into science and make a similar set of recommendations—well before 2010 when meeting the science standard becomes a graduation requirement. We welcome the assignment to ensure that we have world-class math and science instruction.

We applaud the recommendation to focus on strategies that strengthen and support highly skilled teachers and flexible classrooms. Whether our objectives are to improve math and science instruction, better serve our growing English language learner population, nurture creativity and innovation, close the education gap or improve the quality of the early childhood system, the importance of great teaching cannot be overstated. From stronger preparation and licensure methods to providing ample time for professional development and school-based collaboration, we need a major focus on quality teaching. The section on this topic holds great promise.

The State Board of Education also plans to be a vigorous advocate for the resources needed to implement the Washington Learns recommendations. We feel strongly that as a state we are long overdue to revise the state's definition of basic education funding. The definition must be rewritten so it aligns with our state's higher standards and with the performance goals - we cannot continue to use an outmoded, input-based, investment model while simultaneously holding kids accountable to meet outcome-based academic standards. We must provide the appropriate opportunities to learn. We need to redefine what constitutes a "basic" education based on the high standards we are trying to achieve and then increase funding levels as well as revise methods of funding. We must provide necessary resources of time, instruction and professional development. All systems must push toward much higher levels of student achievement. Sensible recommendations around increasing learning time, funding full day kindergarten and expanded professional development would be likely elements of any revised definition.

In closing I would like to thank you for your work and dedication. We think we have a great opportunity to put our state's children at the front of the line. We at the State Board of Education applaud your work—we urge you to stay strong and aim high. We will be with you to advocate for enactment of these recommendations and to help get the job done.